



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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British subjects on the Turks and Caicos Islands demand the removal of their governor, 1996

February

1996

to: September

1996

Country: Turks and Caicos Islands

Location City/State/Province: *Primarily on Grand Turk Island*

Goals:

For the British Foreign Office to remove Governor Martin Bourke

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 004. Signed public statements
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 013. Deputations
- 055. Social boycott
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 055. Social boycott
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials
- 145. General administrative noncooperation

Methods in 4th segment:

- 055. Social boycott
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials
- 145. General administrative noncooperation

Methods in 5th segment:

- 055. Social boycott
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials
- 145. General administrative noncooperation

Methods in 6th segment:

- 055. Social boycott
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials
- 145. General administrative noncooperation

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Group characterization:

- Internal government of the Turks and Caicos Islands
- citizens of the islands

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Ministers on the Turks and Caicos Islands, particularly Chief Minister Derek Taylor

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Shadow overseas development minister George Foulkes (a minister in Britain)

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- George Foulkes
- Ministers on the Turks and Caicos Islands
- Turks and Caicos citizens

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 1 month 7 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

British Foreign Office

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

not known

Campaigner violence:

Campaigners broke through a police barricade on February 21st. The British government perceived this as a violent act, but it appears that, although the campaigners did physically push their way through, they did not threaten or harm any of the police officers.

Repressive Violence:

Although there was no known repressive violence, the campaigners perceived a British threat of violence when they moored a large and heavily armed warship in Turks and Caicos waters, reinforced the local police force, and told police in Manchester to be ready to get involved.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign did not succeed in convincing the Foreign Office to remove Governor Bourke, but they did successfully ensure that Britain did not renew Bourke's contract, which came up for renewal about 6 months after the start of the campaign. The campaign's secondary goals, particularly a desire to restructure the appointments system, do not appear to have succeeded.

Turks and Caicos is a British Territory of 8 islands in the Caribbean with a formal population of approximately 15,000, mostly descendants of African slaves. England appoints a Governor to the island for a minimum of three years, but the islands also have their own local government, a legislative council of 13 ministers. Because of their geographic location, the islands are a convenient stop in drug smuggling to the United States. The drug trade through the Islands climaxed in 1985, when U.S. authorities caught a native official bringing drugs to the United States.

In February of 1996, a local jury acquitted four prominent Islanders of drug smuggling charges. The verdict caused much local celebration, as many Islanders viewed it as a triumph of blacks over whites and imperial subjects over imperial rule. That same month, Governor Martin Bourke, in an interview for a publication of the offshore financial industry, said that the island faced corruption, police incompetence, rising crime rates, drug trafficking, and drug addiction.

On Wednesday, February 21, 1996, the Legislative Council of the Turks and Caicos Islands, with the support of both major political parties, sent a nine-page petition demanding the recall of Governor Martin Bourke. Petitioners and the ministers attempted to deliver the petition to the Governor's home on Grand Turk, but found police blocking the entrance. They managed to get by, and demanded that they see the Governor. At first, Bourke refused to see more than two ministers, as they had no appointment, but after approximately 20 minutes, he came outside and accepted the petition. British authorities later viewed the manner in which protesters got through the police barricade as violent; although the protesters did push their way through, it does not appear that they used strong force or hurt any of the officers, and police and demonstrators got together later for sodas and a game of dominoes.

On the same Wednesday, 300 people attended a meeting on the central island of Grand Turk, and the next day, another 500 attended a meeting on the island of Providenciales. The local government had scheduled these meetings to discuss the petition they were sending to England. Also in late February and early March, people on the islands held demonstrations and publicly denounced the Governor on a few occasions.

The petition expressed unhappiness at the disrespect the islanders felt Bourke's interview had shown for the island. They felt that his remarks would hurt tourism and offshore finance, the nation's first and second sources of money. The islanders were also unhappy with the fact that Bourke had allowed his family to get around customs and had appointed himself an officer of the peace for a few weeks in order to perform a marriage for his brother-in-law. They found such behavior to be "high-handed, autocratic, and despotic," and generally found that the position of Governor wielded too much power, nearing the amount of power of a dictator. Bourke had also quintupled (to 200) the islands' prison capacity and prevented a radio station from airing a minister's protest to this act.

It is notable that, although crime rates rose as Bourke said, they remained the lowest in the region. The 40% increase in crime meant a total of 14 burglaries and 2 armed assaults. Many islanders felt that this was not cause for the Governor to criticize the rising crime rate, especially since such news would hurt the local economy.

Among the demands in the petition, ministers did not ask for independence, although some islanders may have wanted that. Although ministers wanted a change in the way England appointed governors, they did not want freedom from British rule. This may have been partially due to the fact that the Islands depended on England for 20% of their budget.

On March 1, Governor Bourke appeared at a ceremony in a library with a bodyguard accompanying him. Chief Minister Derek Taylor verbally condemned the action, saying it was needlessly provocative.

On March 2, shadow overseas development minister George Foulkes in Great Britain said that the accusations in the petition merited serious consideration and investigation. He further suggested that the Foreign Office reconsider their method of appointing governors, which he found to have an overly colonialist attitude.

By the middle of March, the Islanders had stopped calling Bourke "Governor." Newspapers carried headlines demanding that Bourke leave. In early March, demonstrators discovered Bourke getting on an early morning plane to the United States, and started screaming "Bourke must go" at him.

On April 1, six of the islands' ministers went to the Foreign Office in England to request Bourke's removal. They gave the petition to a Foreign Office Minister there. On April 2, the Office rejected the petition, saying that they found the accusations to be groundless, and that, on the contrary, Bourke was doing a good job as Governor. They added that they would not hear any future demands, which might include violence or the threat of it. However, information that emerged later suggests that the Foreign Office and the ministers reached a compromise in the meeting, insofar as England agreed not to renew Bourke's term when it came up for renewal in September. It is possible that they did not make this offer until later in the campaign.

It is unclear why the Foreign Office felt that the ministers had threatened violence. It may have been in reference to the brief altercation between petitioners and police on the 21st, when they attempted to give Bourke the petition. However, local politicians Taylor and Misick guaranteed that the struggle would be nonviolent.

Within the next two days, England had sent four reinforcement police officers to the Islands, whose police force traditionally had 130 officers. They also sent the warship H.M.S. Brave to the area. Although they denied that it was connected to the campaign on the islands, they nevertheless moored the heavily armed ship close by, where it could easily help support Bourke. They also called 100 police officers from nearby Manchester and told them to be prepared to go to Turks and Caicos if necessary. Governor Bourke said that he was scared for the safety of himself and his wife, saying that violence would not surprise him.

Within a week, the ministers implied in a signed statement that they would not cooperate with Bourke for the remainder of his term. However, the statement also hinted at a compromise with the Foreign Office not to renew Bourke's term. The main

purpose of the statement was to condemn Bourke for suggesting that the campaigners had threatened violence, saying that it was false and conniving.

On April 15 or 16, the ministers responded to the warship's presence, demanding that England withdraw what they saw as a threat of military intervention. They also asked that England compensate the Islands for any money lost in tourism or finance as a result of the negative image and publicity Bourke had caused.

On April 17, Sir Nicholas Bonsor, the Foreign Office's Minister of State came to Turks and Caicos. He confirmed both that he would not remove Bourke immediately and that the Foreign Office would not renew Bourke's term in September, finding any demands beyond a failure to renew unreasonable. Bonsor also acknowledged that they had sent the H.M.S. Brave in case of violence, but denied that it was itself a threat of force.

Minister Taylor articulated that Bourke was not the only issue, but that the larger matter of the Islands' relationship with England was at stake. Particularly, Taylor thought it was probably wise to revise the appointment process, because he thought British officials treated the position of Turks and Caicos Governor as a less serious post, where people could enjoy themselves and do largely as they pleased with their power. Taylor thought that they should reexamine the appointment process itself to ensure the selection of governors that took the position seriously. However, this cause of unhappiness was not a goal or demand of the campaign.

By early May, the Ministers had refused to attend any meetings that Bourke was chairing. By June, the ministers' refusal to cooperate with the Governor had halted virtually all government work on the islands. However, by this point the ministers had effectively won their primary demand. Although England had refused to remove Bourke before the end of his term, they had made clear by early May that they would not extend Bourke's term beyond September, when it was set to expire. Of the last four governors, Bourke was the first not to serve beyond the minimum term of three years; the Foreign Office tended to renew governors appointments.

In October, England appointed a new Governor to the Turks and Caicos Islands.

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